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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 006522

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: "JORDAN FIRST": KING SEEKS TO PROMOTE LOYALTY

Classified By: AMBASSADOR EDWARD W. GNEHM. REASONS: 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY. In mid-October, the GOJ rolled out an extensive public relations campaign to promote its new "Jordan First" domestic political initiative. Billboards, signs and posters emblazoned with the motto "al-Urdun Awaalan" (Jordan First) and a Jordanian flag held aloft by five hands (each representing a different segment of Jordanian society) are now displayed throughout the country. On October 30, the King articulated his conception of "Jordan First" in more detail in a letter to PM Ali Abul Ragheb, and instructed the PM to form a "Jordan First" committee to implement it. Reactions to the initiative in the media and in our discussions with Jordanians have thus far been mixed, and will be reported septel. END SUMMARY

JORDAN FIRST IN ELECTIONS

2. (C) The King first discussed "Jordan First" in the context of planned forthcoming elections in Jordan. On October 9, the King discussed the initiative during an interview with Pan-Arab satellite station MBC, which was printed in its entirety by the Jordanian media. The King said that "elections should be national, bearing a national agenda, and within the frame of the slogan 'Jordan first'." Continuing, the King said that he would prefer "two or three" political parties (as opposed to the current 30) and was critical of the fact that many fringe parties, such as the Communists and Ba'athists, are directed by movements outside of Jordan. Turning to the Muslim Brotherhood, the King said that, "for the sake of fairness, the Islamic current in Jordan and the Muslim Brothers in particular, were very devoted to the interests of Jordan. But unfortunately, there are links between this party and other parties outside Jordan."

3. (C) The same week, billboards, placards and posters emblazoned with the motto "al-Urdun Awaalan" and a Jordanian flag held aloft by five hands were displayed around the country. Note: The five hands holding the flag include a female's, a soldier's, one cuffed in traditional Palestinian attire, a muscled hand of a laborer, and a manicured hand of a professional.

JORDAN FIRST IN LOYALTIES

3. (C) On October 30, the King presented a Royal Letter to PM Ali Abul Ragheb explaining the campaign's purpose as "an axial idea and national starting point from where we embark on thinking and acting, and to serve as a tool to measure performance and true citizenship." Arguing that this national principle is already embedded in the conscience of Jordanians, the King wrote that "We want to establish this principle as a working approach and a daily practice for each Jordanian man and woman who believes in this country as a cradle of security and stability, and one which has a promising future; those who seek fulfillment through their native land, and not via external loyalties whatever the goals and objectives are."

4. (C) The King also named 31 prominent individuals, whom he called on to form a committee to "look into the best ways and mechanisms to convey the 'Jordan First' message and establish it as a daily practice in the educational, economic, social and development circles." On October 31 the King chaired the committee's first meeting.

JORDAN FIRST'S 'NOBLE MESSAGE'

5. (C) In a clear reference to those (either East-Bankers or Palestinian-Jordanians) who may try to use "Jordan First" to support their narrow East Bank or West Bank agendas, the King said that "Jordan First" must have "complete immunity against negative ideas and accusative misinterpretations that, willfully or not, try to deal with 'Jordan First' out of its comprehensive pure and noble context into narrow visions that we do not, and cannot

accept." Turning to the press, he said that "Jordan's press should also give prominence to deal with local issues and the concerns of citizens in a sense of responsibility and patriotism, before any external issue."

COMMENT

16. (C) "Jordan First" is an effort to re-focus Jordanians' attention to issues that the King believes are more important for Jordan during a time of increased regional tension. Now that the King has articulated the meaning behind the billboards, "Jordan first" has become a leading topic of discussion among Jordanians. A full readout of local reaction will be reported septel.
GNEHM